

Gorbachev to Meet With Baltic Leaders

Republics' Independence to Be Discussed

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, June 11—In a gesture that Baltic leaders said could mark a major step in breaking their impasse with Moscow, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has agreed to meet Tuesday with the leaders of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia to discuss the region's bid for independence.

The three Baltic presidents will meet with Gorbachev as members of a presidential advisory group, the Federation Council, and then later in separate sessions. The Soviet leader's encounter with Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis will be the first time the two have met since the republic's March 11 declaration of independence.

Lithuanian legislator Algimantas Cekoulis said that Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov "is still insisting on calling the meetings Tuesday 'discussions' rather than official negotiations, but it's clear we are moving ahead." Ryzhkov is also scheduled to meet with Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene.

Cekoulis said the Lithuanian parliament's decision last month to agree to suspend its laws passed after March 11 during negotiations with Moscow was "instrumental in bringing Moscow to the table." Gorbachev and Ryzhkov had said earlier that they wanted Lithuania to suspend the declaration itself before negotiations could begin. The Kremlin cut off oil and many other fuel and raw materials shipments to Lithuania in April in an effort to pressure the republic into abandoning the declaration.

During the Washington summit earlier this month, the White House reportedly tried to put only minimal pressure on Gorbachev to permit Baltic independence despite the Kremlin's economic blockade of Lithuania. The lifting of the blockade and the start of official negotiations with the Baltic republics would probably help Gorbachev's case in Congress, where legislators will decide the fate of a U.S.-Soviet trade bill signed at the summit.



MIKHAIL S. GORBACHEV
... also to push economic plan

While all three Baltic republics have declared their independence this year, Gorbachev has insisted that secession can come only through a new law that requires a republic-wide referendum, followed by a transition period of up to five years. In recent weeks he has said that independence could take anywhere from two to seven years.

The presidents of the three republics—Arnold Ruutel of Estonia, Anatolijs Gorbunovs of Latvia and Landsbergis of Lithuania—formed a Baltic Alliance in May to coordinate their attempts to win independence. The three Baltic leaders say that they are exempt from the new secession law since their republics were forcibly annexed in 1940 as part of a secret pact between Moscow and Nazi Germany and never willingly accepted membership in the Soviet Union.

Even as they waited for optimistic signs from the Kremlin, the Baltic states have won a few moral victories in recent weeks. The most significant came during the Washington summit when the new president of the Russian federation, maverick populist Boris Yeltsin, expressed public support for the Baltics and discussed the possibility

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of creating direct trade and political links with the republics.

Gorbachev is also scheduled to speak before Tuesday the Supreme Soviet, the nation's principal legislative body, on the new Soviet government plan for economic reform. The plan has been roundly criticized as indecisive, even by Gorbachev's economic advisers.

The parliaments in all three Slavic republics—Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia—have already denounced the plan, saying that its proposal to double and triple food prices without moving more quickly to eliminate centralized planning and other remnants of the Stalinist command economy will lead only to social unrest and deeper cynicism.

In his speech, Gorbachev is expected to urge the Supreme Soviet to pass the transition plan as written. But, government sources say, Gorbachev may yet blame the new plan's deficiencies on the Council of Ministers, or presidential cabinet, force the resignation of Prime Minister Ryzhkov and follow his advisers and move more decisively to-

ward the establishment of a market economy.

With his new public platform, Yeltsin has attacked the economic overhaul for making clear how it would hurt the consumer without ensuring some degree of economic benefit. Yeltsin told a television interviewer Saturday night that he had an "alternative plan" but gave no details.

Gorbachev also faces the possibility of a split in the Communist Party. In an interview, Vyacheslav Shostokovsky, the rector of the Party's Higher School, said that the recent creation of a hard-line, neo-Stalinist Russian Communist Party in Leningrad has "made clear the battle lines."

"If this alliance of party hacks and regional leaders and workers fronts shows any strength, you might find the radicals and the moderates making common cause," Shostokovsky said. "The key question now is where does Gorbachev stand? So far he has been unable to push away the conservatives, the [party stalwarts]. He may want to do it, but so far he doesn't seem willing to take the risk."